DR Costa Boyages is a hipster and proud.

At 34 years of age, he and his wife, Nikki, have settled into a sustainable country life, growing their own vegetables and raising chickens while they work at the local hospital, Shoalhaven District Memorial in Nowra, on the south coast of New South Wales. They live just up the road in Berry, population 2535, and are awaiting the any-moment-now birth of their first child.

It all seems a long way from trade missions in India, not to mention the wilds of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Canberra, but to Dr Boyages it has been a logical and satisfying journey, so far.

“When I was a kid I was equally interested in diplomacy and medicine, but I never got the marks to get into medical school”, he tells the MJA.

Instead, he went to the University of NSW to study Arts/Law and gained honours in international security, winning his way into DFAT’s graduate program.

He served a year’s “penance” in Canberra before travelling overseas as a diplomat on trade missions to the Solomon Islands, and India, as well as a longer-term posting to New Zealand, working on climate change issues.

“I loved what I was doing”, Dr Boyages says. “But I kept getting this nagging feeling that doctoring was my calling.”

So he took the leap, joining the graduate program at the University of Sydney’s School of Medicine. His last 2 years as a diplomat overlapped with his medical studies and he graduated in 2013.

“It was a bit of an intellectual gear-shift”, Dr Boyages admits. “I had to bone up on the basic sciences, and the truth is it’s the human dimensions of medicine that interest me the most.”

Unsurprisingly, it is general practice that has attracted his attention. Now in his PGY2 at Shoalhaven it is life as a rural GP that beckons.

“I’m probably over-romanticising it, but I want to practice [the kind of] medicine which makes me a part of the community, providing continuity of care — that cradle to grave stuff”, he says.

“As a diplomat, my only expertise was in relationship management and that fits in well with my generalist persuasions.”

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Add to that the urge to settle down after the itinerant lifestyle of a diplomat and Dr Boyages had found his true calling.

The plan is to spend the next 2 years completing his GP training at Shoalhaven, and then the travelling life may once more call Dr Boyages and his wife.

“We hope to do a bit of volunteering abroad for a couple of years, while the kid is still small”, he says.

Adding to his already busy schedule, Dr Boyages has recently signed up as an Army Reserve medical officer to boost his qualifications in disaster relief and humanitarian aid. He’s also doing some medico-legal consulting work, and is the Illawarra/Shoalhaven representative on the Australian Medical Association’s NSW Branch Council.

Oh, and he’s teaching at the University of Wollongong.

“I’d like to do some more study in global health”, he says, “but I’ve got a bit on my plate at the moment.”

Just a few weeks ago Dr Boyages was named the winner of the MJA, MDA National Nossal Global Health Prize, for his essay Malnutrition: a global health perspective from a Timorese mountain.1

He combined his experiences volunteering at a clinic in Dili on Timor-Leste with his diplomatic skills and international experience to provide an insight into how individual medical practitioners can play a part in reducing the scourge of global malnutrition.

“It really had an impact on me. It was humbling, confronting and I was very keenly aware of the stark disparity between the haves and the have-nots of the world.

“As an international diplomat I was always aware of that, of course, but it’s not until you get on the ground and become part of the health care system of a place that you really see it. It was very sobering.

“We’re very, very lucky to live in the country we do. I wish more people realised that.”

Dr Boyages is of Greek heritage and his father, Steven, is an endocrinologist in Sydney’s west.

“He was born in Australia, but my mother was born in Greece and came out here when she was very young”, the junior Boyages says. “But it turns out the families lived a street apart back in Greece.”

He and Nikki — an emergency department nurse at Shoalhaven — continued the tradition.

“I was working in a hospital in Hanoi in Vietnam in 2011, doing an obstetrics and gynaecology rotation, and she was also on a student placement, in the emergency department. That’s how we met.”

It seems that wherever life takes Dr Costa Boyages and his family, it’s certainly not going to be a dull existence.

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Medicos feature in Australian of the Year state finals

Medical practitioners and other health professionals have featured heavily in the list of state and territory finalists for the 2016 Australian of the Year awards.

**Australian of the Year finalists**

**NSW**

Cardiothoracic surgeon, Dr Ian Nicholson, AM, is a regular volunteer with Open Heart International, delivering treatment to impoverished parts of Papua New Guinea, Rwanda and Cambodia. He also operates in a number of Sydney hospitals, including Sydney Adventist. He also represents the interests of Open Heart International within the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

**VIC**

Professor George Jelinek was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in 1999 after a distinguished career in emergency medicine. He discovered MS could be controlled through good nutrition and exercise. He initiated the world’s first lifestyle MS self-help program in 2002, and founded Overcoming Multiple Sclerosis. This year he was appointed Head of Neuroepidemiology at the University of Melbourne.

**SA**

Dr John Greenwood, AM, is a plastic surgeon and Medical Director of the Adult Burn Centre at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, covering SA, NT, western NSW and western Victoria. He runs education services, and heads the nation’s only mobile burn response unit in disaster scenarios. Since 2003, Dr Greenwood has been developing skin substitute products based on a biodegradable polyurethane platform.

**ACT**

Former president of the Australian Medical Association (1993–1995), Dr Brendan Nelson, has been nominated for his work as Director of the Australian War Memorial, overseeing a significant upgrade to the Memorial’s World War One galleries and personalising the honour roll, he has breathed life into the AWM.

**Senior Australian of the Year finalists**

**NSW**

Professor Gordian Fulde has been director of one of Australia’s busiest emergency departments, St Vincent’s Hospital and Sydney Hospital for more than 3 decades. He is outspoken about ‘ice’ and alcohol-fuelled violence. He is actively involved in teaching and training students and staff, and is on the Board of the Thomas Kelly Youth Foundation.

Dr Yvonne McMaster, OAM, was one of the first palliative care specialists in Australia. After retirement she became a formidable health advocate. Dr McMaster has led petitions and media campaigns, written countless letters and delivered speeches in country towns and inner city enclaves. The backbone behind the Push for Palliative crusade, she campaigns for the right of people to die with dignity.

**Young Australian of the Year**

**WA**

Dr Bronwyn Jones has undertaken voluntary clinical placements in South Africa, Sri Lanka, Egypt and the US, conducted HIV research at the WHO headquarters in Switzerland, and improved health literacy in rural Zimbabwe. She spent a year volunteering in an Aboriginal clinic in rural WA, worked on the Youth Advisory Board of the WA Red Cross and represented the Australian Medical Students’ Association.

Dr Vinay Menon has worked in malaria research in Burkina Faso, with leprosy patients in India, and in Tanzanian refugee camps. Here Dr Menon has volunteered with Aboriginal children through medical clinics in the Kimberley, and in Arnhem Land. He was elected the national youth leader of Red Cross for 3 years, and is now a Resident Medical Officer at the Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne.

**TAS**

A neuroscientist, Dr Lila Landowski is seeking a cure for peripheral neuropathy, presenting findings nationally and internationally, and training at the Mayo Clinic in the US. She teaches at the University of Tasmania and through the Wicking Dementia Centre’s Understanding Dementia online course. Dr Landowski shares her love of science with schools and in a regular spot on ABC Radio.

**ACT**

Dr Kate Eisenberg, a former support worker for Karinya House for Mothers and Babies, is a doctor at Calvary Hospital. As a published author, she’s emphasised the importance of gender awareness in medicine and as a communicator at the National Science and Technology Centre she has inspired young women to change their career paths. She also ran a project reducing clinical waste in hospitals.

**Australia’s Local Heroes**

**NSW**

Dr Anne Bunde-Birouste, from the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of NSW, has created a life-changing program for refugee youth as they transition into Australian society. While undertaking her PhD, she created Football United together with other strategies to inspire young people, foster their educational engagement and promote social justice and cross-cultural harmony.

**WA**

Now Medical Director of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) in WA, Dr Stephen Langford started at the front line in 1983. He has introduced innovations, from treatment preventing premature birth to ultrasound diagnostic capabilities, and special transfer equipment for heavy patients. Dr Langford campaigned for a fast Hawker 800 jet, transforming how emergency medical teams could respond.

**ACT**

Medical researcher Yanping Zhang has built one of the world’s most comprehensive and long-lasting studies of breast cancer treatments and outcomes. For over 18 years, she and her team have collected detailed medical data on almost every breast cancer case (95%) in the ACT and surrounds. This has contributed to the ACT’s higher-than-average survival rates and advances in treatment.

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Calendar of conferences in Australia and New Zealand

This calendar includes conferences based in Australia into the foreseeable future, as far as can be confirmed. If you have an event you would like to add, please include relevant details in an email to cswannel@mja.com.au

JANUARY 2016

29 Jan-1 Feb MRI in Practice. The Course. Sydney, NSW

FEBRUARY 2016

10-11 Australian and New Zealand Comea Society Meeting. Melbourne, VIC

11 5th International Medical Symposium: Future Challenges for the Medical Profession. Sydney, NSW

11 12th UroGynaecological Society of Australasia Annual Scientific and General Meeting. Auckland, NZ

11-13 2016 ANZSNR Meeting. Hunter Valley, NSW

11-14 Australian and New Zealand Academy of Eating Disorders 2016 Workshop Series. Canberra, ACT

12-13 RACS New Zealand Association of General Surgeons. Auckland, NZ

12-13 2016 Neuroendocrinology Society of Australian and New Zealand 11th Annual Scientific Meeting. Perth, WA

12-13 Australian Pain Society 36th Annual Scientific Meeting: Pain: Meeting the Challenge. Perth, WA

14-17 Trans Tasman Radiation Oncology Group 28th ASM. Brisbane, QLD

15-18 Workshop on Surgical Techniques in the Laboratory Mouse. Moss Vale, NSW

16-19 6th New Directions in Leukaemia Research Meeting. Noosa, QLD

18-19 2016 Symposium: Silent Contributors Injury/Performance. Bruce, ACT

19 RANZCO NSW Branch Annual Scientific Meeting. Hunter Valley, NSW

19-20 Rural Health West Annual Conference: Yin and Yang of Rural Health Care – Men and Women’s Health from the Adolescent to the Elderly. Perth, WA

19-23 Ottawa and ANZAHPE 2016 Conference. Perth, WA

20-24 14th International Workshop on Radiation Damage to DNA. Melbourne, VIC

21-23 23rd World Congress on Controversies in Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Infertility. Melbourne, VIC

25 Mar-2 Apr Autism, ADHD and Developmental Disabilities New Zealand Cruise. Sydney, NSW

29 Mar-1 Apr Asia Pacific Orthopaedic Association Congress 2016. Melbourne, VIC

30 Mar-1 Apr ANZICS New Zealand Regional Meeting. Rotorua, NZ

31 Mar-1 Apr Social Research Conference on HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Related Diseases: Margins and Belonging. Sydney, NSW

MARCH 2016

1 Asian-Australasian Society for Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery Meeting. Cairns, QLD

2-4 Internal Medicine Society of Australia and New Zealand (NZ Branch) Conference 2016. Maribyrnong, VIC

3-4 Evidence Review in Emergency Medicine FSM. Wollongong, NSW

3-5 AGES XXVII Annual Scientific Meeting 2016. Brisbane, QLD

3-5 RANZCR Australasian Brachytherapy Group 25th ASM. Fremantle, WA

4-5 Australian and New Zealand Strabismus Society Meeting. TBC

5 RANZCR Victorian Branch Annual Scientific Meeting. Melbourne, VIC

5-6 Highlights of the American Society of Hematology in Asia-Pacific. Brisbane, QLD

6-8 Australian Society of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery ASM 2016. Melbourne, VIC

7 ICU Research Coordinator Workshop 2016. Noosa, QLD

8-10 18th Annual Meeting on Clinical Trials in Intensive Care. Noosa, QLD

9 39th International Conference on Medical and Health Sciences. Melbourne, VIC

10-11 WA Mental Health Conference. Perth, WA

APRIL 2016

1-3 Abdominal Radiology Group Australia and New Zealand Annual Meeting. Fremantle, WA

1-6 Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand ASM 2016. Perth, WA

3-6 NETNEP 2016. Brisbane, QLD

7-9 41st Annual Scientific Meeting of the New Zealand Pain Society. New Plymouth, NZ

8 ANZCP Trauma on the Border. Tweed Heads, NSW


13-16 General Assembly and International Conference on Asian Pacific Organisation of Cancer Prevention. Brisbane, QLD

16 Academics World 35th International Conference on Recent Advances in Medical and Health Sciences. Melbourne, VIC

16-19 Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand ASM. Gold Coast, QLD


22-24 17th Annual Scientific Meeting of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy. Brisbane, QLD

22-25 Annual Scientific Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Nuclear Medicine (ANZSNM): Hot Science: An Eruption of Isotopes. Rotorua, NZ

30 Australasian Musculoskeletal Imaging Group Annual Meeting. Sydney, NSW

MAY 2016

2-3 12th International Conference on Rapid Response Systems and Medical Emergency Teams. Melbourne, VIC

6 Centre for Palliative Care Research and Education Annual Research Conference. Brisbane, QLD

6-7 2016 Australian Diabetes Educators Association WA Branch Conference: Creating Links. New Norcia, WA

14-17 49th Australasian College of Dermatologists ASM. Perth, WA

16-17 3rd Eating Disorders and Obesity Conference. Gold Coast, QLD

16-18 Royal Australasian College of Physicians Annual Congress. Adelaide, SA

18-20 The Australian and New Zealand Addiction Conference: Addiction 2016. Gold Coast, QLD

19-20 ACRE Queensland Autumn Symposium. Brisbane, QLD

22-25 Perinatal Society of Australia and New Zealand 20th Annual Congress: Perinatal Topics in the Tropics. Townsville, QLD

24-27 Australian and New Zealand 2016 ASM. Perth, WA


26-28 2016 Asia Pacific Lymphology Conference. Dunedin, NZ

27-28 RANZCO NZ Branch Annual Scientific Meeting. Dunedin, NZ

30-31 5th Australian and New Zealand Disaster and Emergency Management Conference. Gold Coast, QLD

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